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A Historically Informed Performance of a Woman's Love and Life

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A Historically Informed Performance of a Woman's Love & Life

A well-written love story begins as one might expect. There once was a young maiden, who falls in love at first sight. Blinded to everything else in the world but him, it doesn't occur to her that she might be a worthy bride. When he confesses his love for her, she almost can't believe it's real. After he proposes, she promises to devote herself to him. As she leaves her childhood behind to get married, she looks forward to a life with her future husband. Part of this future, as might be expected with newlyweds, includes the joyful news of having a baby. The young mother is the happiest she has ever felt, with her life full of love and contentment. But, of course, not all stories have a happy ending. Tragedy strikes, and her beloved husband dies. In a state of shock, she mourns her husband and retreats within herself, to live in the memories of a time when she was happy.¹

This story is based on the poetry of Adalbert von Chamisso, a German poet, who wrote a set of lyrical poems.² Robert Schumann, among other composers, took a selection of Chamisso's poems and set them to music to create his well-known song cycle, *Frauenliebe und Leben*.³ In order to give an outstanding performance of this celebrated song cycle, the most important thing, besides learning the music, is to learn the history behind it. It greatly helps the performer to have knowledge of the music, which in turn helps with communicating the narrative to the audience. The point of giving a historically informed performance is to provide the audience

¹ Beaumont Glass, *Schumann's Complete Song Texts: In One Volume*. Geneseo, NY: Leyerle Publications, 2002, 77.

² Ibid.

³ Rufus Hallmark, "The Rückert Lieder of Robert and Clara Schumann," *19th-century Music* 14, no. 1 (1990): 6, doi:10.2307/746673.

with every opportunity of understanding the thoughts and emotions the performer is conveying through the music, no matter the language.

Robert Schumann, a prolific German composer of the Romantic era, was an articulate and self-taught musician.⁴ His most prosperous period of composing was in the year 1840, which has been dubbed his “Year of Song.”⁵ In a six-month period in 1840, from February through July, Schumann composed approximately one hundred songs, and that includes the eight songs of the *Frauenliebe und Leben* cycle based on the poetry of Chamisso, which Schumann wrote within two days in July.⁶ When it comes to German Lieder, what distinguishes Schumann as a composer is his creative ability to set poetry to music in a most effective manner. “Schumann chose poems that either directly mirrored his own feelings or could be adjusted to reflect them. The resulting songs mirror the life of the man and his music. They tell a life story of genesis, growth, maturity and decline.”⁷ This is evident in the songs Schumann wrote in 1840, especially in his song cycle, *Frauenliebe und Leben*. The text conveys a similar story of a young person, bright-eyed and gifted, who matures into a knowledgeable adult and experiences all that life has to offer, from the joys to the sorrows. “Schumann’s setting of the text immediately picks up the meaning of the words.”⁸ The way in which Schumann composed the song cycle shows his attention to detail in how he fit the words with the music. Furthermore, he not only succeeded in correlating the rhythms and the words together, he expressed the text’s feeling and emotion in and through the music.

⁴ John Worthen, *Robert Schumann: Life and Death of a Musician*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007, 10.

⁵ Jon W. Finson, *Robert Schumann: The Book of Songs*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007, 17.

⁶ Hallmark, “The Rückert Lieder of Robert and Clara Schumann,” 6.

⁷ David Ferris, “Robert Schumann, Composer of Songs,” *Music Analysis* 32, no. 2 (July 2013): 252, *Music Index*, EBSCOhost, accessed December 28, 2015, doi:10.1111/musa.12014.

⁸ Julia Nafisi, “Lehn' deine Wang' an meine Wang': Heinrich Heine and Robert Schumann Revisited,” *Australian Voice* 14, no. 1 (November 2008): 5, *Music Index*, EBSCOhost, accessed December 28, 2015, doi:10.1375/auv.14.1.1.

Often present is a certain emotional self-indulgence made bearable and even lovable through either a pinch of irony or a naïve sincerity that defies cheap sentimentality. The music, going far beyond only the illustrative, complements the words in an interpreting and deepening way, adding layers to the one-dimensional and simplifying the complicated: music and words fuse and in their union become something new. Melodic or rhythmic phrases, though bound by musical law, never lose their connection to the word.⁹

This is the beauty of German *Lieder*. When it is well written, the audience can enjoy the full expression of the music. Although non-German speakers may not be able to understand the German text as it is being sung, if the performer emotes well, then the audience can still grasp what the artist is trying to convey.

The emotions that Schumann specifically conjures up in the *Frauenliebe und Leben* song cycle aren't simply what he gleaned from Chamisso's poems. It has been said that the song cycles written in 1840 had a connection with his marriage to Clara Wieck that same year. It seems that, as a result of his marriage, Schumann wrote more of his personal feelings into his music. While the main female character recounts her devotion to her husband and family, the audience is provided with a glimpse of a highly romanticized masculine perspective of courtship and marriage as both the poet and composer are male. Though Schumann himself was "as blissfully happy in marriage as in courtship," toward the end *Frauenliebe und Leben*, it is unfortunate that "something has gone sadly wrong."¹⁰ This is a well-crafted commentary on life; our experiences have a way of shaping us into the people we are, and they can have a great effect on us, whether it be positive or negative. In this case, *Frauenliebe und Leben* successfully reflects the realities of life in that there is a mixture of the positive and the negative, and it all depends on what the life circumstances are as to how people react. With this song cycle, it is unmistakably beneficial to know the ideas behind the composer's creativity.

⁹ Ibid., 2.

¹⁰ Ferris, "Robert Schumann, Composer of Songs," 253.

It is vital to remember that the composers and poets of those songs were real people, that their emotions were real and evidence that they too were young once. Their thoughts and problems were probably not so very different in many respects from those of young people today; the emotions expressed in the words and music are very real and therefore are still recognizable today.¹¹

There is a wide range of emotions in his songs, and they usually correlate with the events and emotions of real life. This allows the audience to connect with the dynamics that Schumann expresses through the voices of his characters. The almost universal relatability of the emotions in Schumann's song cycles "offer[s] an insight into the human soul's most vulnerable parts, yet stay always perfectly within the boundaries of good taste."¹² In his music, Schumann has an artful balance of conveying emotion without overdramatizing it, though he himself was prone to mood swings and spells of depression.

While there is a lot of debate over Schumann's mental health and how it may or may not have affected his compositions, "Through hard work Schumann was able to control his demons and channel the tensions that seethed within him into music that mixes the popular and esoteric, resulting in compositions that require the creative engagement of reader and listener."¹³

Schumann's somewhat unique method of composition reveals his own personality within his music. At a glance, it demonstrates itself to be a solid composition; even so, Schumann's music can prove to be as multifaceted as he is in its underlying messages. Schumann's specific approach to the *Frauenliebe und Leben* song cycle "argues for the presence of a subtext in the poetry, interprets that subtext as running counter to the text, and purposes that Schumann gives the subtext full play in the songs."¹⁴ His focus is on the heroine and how she aims to be an

¹¹ Nafisi, "Heinrich Heine and Robert Schumann Revisited," 5.

¹² Ibid., 2.

¹³ Martin Geck and Stewart Spencer. *Robert Schumann: The Life and Work of a Romantic Composer*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013, iii.

¹⁴ Elissa S. Guralnick, "'Ah Clara, I Am Not Worthy of Your Love': Rereading 'Frauenliebe und Leben,' the Poetry and the Music," *Music & Letters* 87, no. 4 (November 2006): 581, *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost, accessed December 28, 2015, doi:10.1093/ml/gcl080.

acceptable young woman in the society of her day. This, the main text, exemplifies being a humble and submissive young lady, but the underlying subtext proves her to be more spirited and independent than anyone realizes, especially herself. Schumann's musical composition of the text offers a keen insight into the lyrics of these songs.¹⁵ As an example of Schumann's creativity, at the beginning of the first song of the cycle, the piano introduction is not meaningless in and of itself. Schumann wrote the chord progression I-IV-V⁷-I to suggest the formulaic opening line 'Once upon a time' before the heroine delves into her story.¹⁶

Ex. mm. 1-3 of Schumann's *Frauenliebe und Leben*, Song 1¹⁷



The piano begins the song with one of the most conventional harmonic progressions, which gives a “sense of the progression’s gesture...of an opening out (I-IV) and a complementary closing in (V7-I), or, to use an alternative metaphor, an undermining of I and its restoration.”¹⁸ It

¹⁵ Ibid., 602.

¹⁶ Kofi Agawu, “Theory and Practice in the Analysis of the Nineteenth-Century 'Lied,’” *Music Analysis* 11, no. 1 (March 1992): 16, *RILM Abstracts of Music Literature (1967 to Present only)*, EBSCOhost, accessed December 28, 2015, doi:10.2307/854301.

¹⁷ Ibid., 9.

¹⁸ Ibid., 15.

only makes sense, and further proves his creativity, that Schumann used a musical equivalent of ‘Once upon a time’ to start his story.

It has been said that *Frauenliebe und Leben* is “an impersonation of a woman by the voices of male culture, rather than. . . the reality of a woman’s life.”¹⁹ During the Romantic era, it was not uncommon for male authors to lend their emotions to female characters. There are some who view a female’s fervent devotion to a man, as seen throughout the *Frauenliebe* poems, as more of a danger than a virtue. This danger is the very thing that Schumann sought to dramatize in his song cycle.²⁰

Here daughters of the citizenry could find their womanly role in life sketched out for them, from first love, through wedding, motherhood, and widowhood, to old age and death. Like Gretchen’s song at the spinning wheel, these poems too involve role-playing. They portray a man’s wishful image of woman, prescribing to the point of embarrassment her path to exemplary status through subjugation to man. She finds fulfillment in self-sacrificing service to him and in glorifying him.²¹

While society in Schumann’s day did not think this was an unacceptable way to characterize women, this depiction would have today’s society seething from the unjust way in which it portrays women. Yet during the Romantic era, before the feminist movement, Schumann’s audiences would have accepted this projection of a male’s perspective and would not question the role given to the women in the texts of this period.

Though actually conveying the sentiments of men, they are of course to be performed by a woman. . . in a small and intimate room in someone’s home, before people who are known to her and some of whom might well be potential suitors; she is unlikely to be a professional singer but, rather, someone’s daughter or niece or cousin – an ordinary woman, significantly enough – and she sings, in the native tongue. . . texts which seem already to have been popular favorites, no doubt to an audience of approvingly nodding heads.²²

¹⁹ Jane M. Bowers, “Feminist Scholarship and the Field of Musicology: I,” *College Music Symposium* 29 (1989): 89, *RILM Abstracts of Music Literature (1967 to Present only)*, EBSCOhost, accessed December 28, 2015, <http://0-www.jstor.org.library.cedarville.edu/stable/40373950>.

²⁰ Guralnick, “Rereading ‘Frauenliebe und Leben,’” 580.

²¹ Kristina Muxfeldt, “Frauenliebe und Leben Now and Then,” *19th-century Music* 25, no. 1 (July 2001): 28, *Music Index*, EBSCOhost, accessed December 28, 2015, doi:10.1525/ncm.2001.25.1.27.

²² *Ibid.*, 37.

This again points to the subservient position of the female. Not only is she depicted to be lower in status than others within the household, but she attains her fulfillment by seeking the approval of others. Her role here is not necessarily to express herself and her own emotions, but to portray the character from Chamisso's poems that Schumann sought to immortalize through his song cycle.

To better understand these emotions, it is essential to understand Schumann's use of two distinct voices. The female character that sings the lyrics of these songs is apparent, while the unsung male character appears in the piano part. There is distinctiveness in the "expressive function between [the] vocal line and [the] piano accompaniment. The voice, the bearer of words and explicit meaning, discloses thoughts and reveals events on a more conscious level while the piano unveils a deeper, emotional reality that frequently cuts through the surface of the spoken word."²³ Aligning with the subtext, the piano plays the role of the husband. The piano does not simply support and accompany the voice; it keeps disrupting and contradicting it. The voice in this cycle is desire personified, and the piano sometimes yields to it and other times opposes it. This is an example of how the male character explores and responds to their relationship by musically agreeing with or differing from the heroine's thoughts and emotions.²⁴

It is also essential to understand the driving emotions behind each piece since it is through the progression of the song cycle that we are allowed a glimpse into the poetic reflections of a woman's love and life. At the beginning of this song cycle, the heroine is a young woman who has yet to experience all that life has to offer. She doesn't let anything stop her from expressing her feelings about life, at least to herself. Her whole world changes when she

²³ Barbara Turchin, "Schumann's Song Cycles: The Cycle within the Song," *19th-century Music* 8, no. 3 (April 1985): 234, *RILM Abstracts of Music Literature (1967 to Present only)*, EBSCOhost, accessed December 28, 2015, doi:10.2307/746514.

²⁴ Guralnick, "Rereading 'Frauenliebe und Leben,'" 581.

comes across a man who has forever caught the attention of her heart, and she expresses her emotions by singing about how she has gone blind to everything in the world because nothing can be as important as the man who unknowingly stole her heart. This is reflected in the music with a “hesitant, thoughtful, and [poignant expressiveness].”²⁵ This song is slower and more reflective, almost as if she is daydreaming about how they met.

The absence of melodic reinforcement of the downbeats of the first measures in the piece is particularly significant to the music’s realization of the text to follow. Through muting the effect of both the metric and rhythmic accent, this. . . helps to convey a musical fluidity which appropriately mirrors the emotional state of the woman enraptured by her first love.²⁶

Seit ich ihn gesehen

Seit ich ihn gesehen, glaub’ ich blind zu sein;	Since I saw him, I believe I must be blind:
Wo ich hin nur blicke,	Wherever I happen to look,
Seh’ ich ihn allein; wie im wachen Traume	I see only him; his image hovers before me
Schwebt sein Bild mir vor,	As if in a waking dream,
Taucht aus tiefstem Dunkel heller,	His image rises up, brighter and ever brighter,
Heller nur empor.	Out of the deepest darkness.
Sonst ist licht- und farblos alles	Everything else all around me
Um mich her,	Is without light and color,
Nach der Schwestern Spiele	I have no longer any interest
Nicht begehrt’ ich mehr,	In my sisters’ games;
Möchte lieber weinen,	I would rather weep
Still im Kämmerlein; seit ich ihn gesehen,	Quietly in my little room;
Glaub’ ich blind zu sein.	Since I saw him I believe I must be blind. ²⁷

With these lyrics, Schumann expresses the giddiness a young woman feels as she falls in love for the first time. Her youth and exuberance is evident as she wonders at the appearance of her beloved’s image as if she’s enthralled by a waking dream. After she becomes quite taken with him, she doesn’t believe that she will ever be good enough to deserve him. These feelings continue into the second song, as she expresses her admiration for all of the characteristics that

²⁵ Glass, *Schumann's Complete Song Texts: In One Volume*, 78.

²⁶ Michael D. Green, “Mathis Lussy's ‘Traité de l'expression musicale’ as a Window into Performance Practice,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 16, no. 2 (1994), Oxford University Press, Society for Music Theory: 201, doi:10.2307/746033.

²⁷ Glass, *Schumann's Complete Song Texts: In One Volume*, 77.

she cherishes in the man that she loves. Between his appearance and intellect, she likens him to a star in the heavens and claims him as her own, praying that, even though he may never know her, he would live in happiness.

Er, der Herrlichste von allen

Er, der Herrlichste von allen	He, the noblest of men,
Wie so milde, wie so gut!	How gentle he is, how good!
Holde Lippen, klares Auge,	Lovely lips, bright eyes,
Heller Sinn und fester Mut.	A clear mind, and firm courage.
So wie dort in blauer Tiefe,	Like that star there,
Hell und herrlich, jener Stern,	Bright and glorious in the blue depths of the sky.
Also Er an meinem Himmel,	He, in my heaven,
Hell und herrlich, hehr und fern.	Is bright and glorious, exalted, and far above me.
Wandle, wandle deine Bahnen,	Follow, follow your course;
Nur betrachten deinen Schein,	Just to look at your light,
Nur in Demut ihn betrachten,	Just to look at it in humility,
Selig nur und traurig sein!	Is to be both blissful and sad!
Höre nicht mein stilles Beten,	Do not hear my quiet prayer,
Deinem Glücke nur geweiht;	Consecrated only to your happiness;
Darfst mich, nied're Magd, nicht kennen,	You should not know me, an insignificant girl,
Hoher Stern der Herrlichkeit!	You lofty, glorious star!
Nur die Würdigste von allen	Your choice should only make happy
Darf beglücken deine Wahl,	The worthiest of women,
Und ich will die Hohe	And I shall bless that exalted one
Segnen viele tausend Mal.	Many thousand times.
Will mich freuen dannund weinen,	I shall rejoice then, and weep;
Selig, selig bin ich dann,	I shall be blissful then;
Sollte mir das Herz auch brechen,	And even if my heart should break—
Brich, o Herz, was liegt daran?	Go on and break, my heart! What does it matter?
Er, der Herrlichste von allen,	He, the noblest of men,
Wie so milde, wie so gut!	How gentle he is, how good!
Holde Lippen, klares Auge,	Lovely lips, bright eyes, a clear mind,
Heller Sinn und fester Mut,	And firm courage,
Wie so milde, wie so gut!	How gentle he is, how good! ²⁸

Her wish is that only the most virtuous and deserving woman would bring him joy. She would delight in his happiness, but she would also be crestfallen that she couldn't share in it with him. Nonetheless, she told herself it wouldn't matter if her heart broke, just so long as he was satisfied. As it turns out, in the third song, we find that his satisfaction can only be found in her,

²⁸ Ibid., 78.

as he confesses his love for her. Breathless and excited, she almost can't believe that he actually told her. She never expected it and feels almost as though it was all just a dream.

Ich kann's nicht fassen, nicht glauben

Ich kann's nicht fassen, nicht glauben,	I can't grasp it, can't believe it;
Es hat ein Traum mich berückt;	A dream must have beguiled me;
Wie hätt' er doch unter allen	Why, out of all women,
Mich Arme erhöht und beglückt?	Would he have chosen <i>me</i> to honor and bless?
Mir war's, er habe gesprochen:	It seemed to me that he may have said:
"Ich bin auf ewig dein,"	"I am yours forever";
Mir war's--ich träume noch immer,	It seemed to me—I must be dreaming,
Es kann ja nimmer so sein.	It surely can never be so.
O lass im Traume mich sterben,	Oh let me die in that dream,
Gewieget an seiner Brust,	Lulled against his breast,
Den seligen Tod mich schlürfen	Let me sip a blissful death
In Tränen unendlicher Lust.	In tears of endless delight.
Ich kann's nicht fassen, nicht glauben,	I can't grasp it, can't believe it,
Es hat ein Traum mich berückt;	A dream must have beguiled me;
Wie hätt' er doch unter allen	Why, out of all women,
Mich Arme erhöht und beglückt?	Would he have chosen <i>me</i> to honor and bless?
Ich kann's nicht fassen, nicht glauben,	I can't grasp it, can't believe it,
Es hat ein Traum mich berückt.	A dream must have beguiled me. ²⁹

After wondering how this could ever be true, she wishes she could live in this dream, as it seems to her, forever. She is in a state of bliss that he has chosen her as the one to make him happy. Hereafter, she is engaged, and she sings to her engagement ring in the fourth song, expressing the adoration she has for what it means—that she is to be united with the one she loves.

²⁹ Ibid., 80.

Du Ring an meinem Finger

Du Ring an meinem Finger,	You ring on my finger,
Mein goldenes Ringlein	My little golden ring,
Ich drücke dich fromm an die Lippen,	I press you devoutly to my lips,
An das Herze mein.	To my heart.
Ich hatt' ihn ausgeträumet,	I had dreamed it to its end,
Der Kindheit friedlich schönen Traum,	The peacefully beautiful dream of childhood;
Ich fand allein mich,	I found myself alone,
Verloren im öden unendlichen Raum.	Lost in an empty, endless space.
Du Ring an meinem Finger,	You ring on my finger,
Da hast du mich erst belehrt,	You have just taught me something:
Hast meinem Blick erschlossen	You have opened my eyes
Des Lebens unendlichen tiefen Wert.	To the infinitely deep value of life.
Ich will ihm dienen, ihm leben,	I want to serve him, to live for him,
Ihm angehören ganz,	To belong to him completely,
Hin selber mich geben	To give myself to him,
Und finden verklärt mich in seinem Glanz.	And to find myself transfigured in his radiance.
Du Ring an meinem Finger,	You ring on my finger,
Mein goldenes Ringlein,	My little golden ring,
Ich drücke dich fromm an die Lippen,	I press you devoutly to my lips,
An das Herze mein.	To my heart. ³⁰

Living out the days of her childhood, she never dreamed that she would find someone to spend the rest of her days with in happiness. Yet, they did find each other, and her ring serves as a reminder of the important things in life and how much value they have. The ring, as a symbol of their love, is something that she will always cherish. As the time for their wedding approaches, she sings the fifth song to her sisters and asks that they help her prepare for the ceremony. She wishes to make herself as beautiful as possible in the last-minute flurry of preparations.

³⁰ Ibid.

Helft mir, ihr Schwestern

Helft mir, ihr Schwestern,
 Freundlich mich schmücken,
 Dient der Glücklichen heute, mir.
 Windet geschäftig mir um die Stirne
 Noch der blühenden Myrte Zier.
 Als ich befriedigt, freudigen Herzens,
 Sonst dem Geliebten im Arme lag,
 Immer noch reif er, Sehnsucht im Herzen,
 Ungeduldig den heutigen Tag.
 Helft mir, ihr Schwestern,
 Helft mir verscheuchen eine törichte Bangigkeit;
 Dass ich mit klarem Aug' ihn empfangen,
 Ihn die Quelle der Freudigkeit.
 Bist, mein Geliebter, du mir erschienen,
 Gibst du mir, Sonne, deinen Schein?
 Lass mich in Andacht, lass mich in Demut,
 Lass mich verneigen dem Herren mein.
 Streuet ihm, Schwestern, streuet ihm Blumen,
 Bringet ihm knospende Rosen dar.
 Aber euch, Schwestern, grüss' ich mit Wehmut,
 Freudig scheidend aus eurer Schar.

Help me, sisters,
 Be so kind and help me to adorn myself,
 Serve me, the happy woman, today.
 Carefully bind the ornament
 Of blooming myrtle around my forehead.
 When I used to lie contented, and joyous at heart,
 In the arms of my beloved,
 He was always impatiently calling for this day to
 Come, his heart filled with desire.
 Help me, sisters,
 Help me rid my mind of a silly anxiety,
 So that I can receive him,
 The source of my joyousness, with clear eyes.
 Have you appeared before me, my beloved,
 To give me, my sun, your light?
 Let me bow to my lord
 In devotion and in humility.
 Scatter flowers for him, sisters,
 Present him with budding roses.
 But I bid you a melancholy farewell, my sisters,
 As I nevertheless joyously leave your ranks.³¹

In this song, she admits her feeling of anxiety as she dwells on the thought of her groom and his passionate impatience. She shares a bittersweet moment when she comes to the realization that she must leave her sisters and childhood home behind, but she joyfully looks forward to the life she will live with her new husband, as she walks up the aisle to strains of a wedding march.

Since there is no clear timeline, sometime after the wedding in the sixth song, she has some very joyful news to tell her husband. This is the first time in the song cycle that she directly addresses him. In a touching way that was appropriate to the time period, she tells her husband with a quiet tenderness that she is going to have a baby.

³¹ Ibid., 81.

Süßer Freund, du blickest

<p>Süßer Freund, du blickest mich verwundert an, Kannst es nicht begreifen, wie ich Weinen kann; lass der feuchten Perlen ungewohnte Zier freudig hell erzittern In dem Auge mir. Wie so bang mein Busen, Wie so wonnevoll! Wüsst' ich nur Mit Worten, wie ich's sagen soll; Komm und birg dein Antlitz hier an meiner Brust, Will ins Ohr dir flüstern alle meine Lust. Weisst du nun die Tränen, Die ich weinen kann, sollst du nicht sie sehen, Du geliebter, geliebter Mann, Bleib' an Meinem Herzen, fühle dessen Schlag, Dass ich fest und fester nur dich drücken mag! Hier an meinem Bette hat die Wiege Raum, Wo sie still verberge meinen holden Traum; Kommen wird der Morgen, wo der Traum erwacht, Und daraus dein Bildnis Mir entgegen lacht, — dein Bildnis!</p>	<p>Sweet friend, you look at me with astonishment; You can't understand how I Can weep; let the unaccustomed ornament Of moist pearls tremble joyfully and brightly In my eyes. How anxious my heart is, And how blissful! If I only knew How to say it in words; Come and hide your face here on my breast, I want to whisper all my pleasure into your ear. Do you know the reason for the tears That I can weep? Should you not see them, You beloved, beloved man? Stay there near My heart, feel it beating, So that I may press you to me closer and closer! Here by my bed there is room for the cradle, Where it may quietly shelter my lovely dream; The morning will come when the dream awakes, And from the cradle your image Smiles up at me, — your image!³²</p>
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In a piano interlude, the father-to-be conveys his elated response. The middle section relays the relief of happy tears and the joy shared by the husband and wife as they are brought closer together by this happy news. As she sings the last lines of the song, she pictures the cradle and her baby as he smiles up at her—an image of her husband. As she sings the seventh song, one can almost imagine her holding and bouncing her precious baby. The energy she has throughout the song conveys the bliss she feels. To her, love and happiness are interchangeable. She has never been more content in her life as she is now with the husband she never dreamed of and a beautiful child that looks just like his father.

³² Ibid., 83.

An meinem Herzen, an meiner Brust

An meinem Herzen, an meiner Brust,	At my heart, at my breast,
Du meine Wonne, du meine Lust! Das Glück	You my bliss, you my joy! The happiness
Ist die Liebe, die Lieb' ist das Glück,	Is the love, the love is the happiness,
Ich hab's gesagt und nehm's nicht zurück.	I have said it and will not take it back.
Hab' überschwenglich mich geschätzt,	I thought I was rapturous before,
Bin übergücklich aber jetzt.	But I am even more supremely happy now.
Nur die da säugt nur die da liebt das Kind,	Only she who nurses her baby, who loves the child
Dem sie die Nahrung gibt;	To whom she is giving nourishment,
Nur eine Mutter weiss allen,	Only a <i>mother</i> knows
Was lieben heisst und glücklich sein.	What it means to love and to be happy.
O wie bedaur' ich doch den Mann,	Oh how sorry I feel for a man
Der Mutterglück nicht fühlen kann!	That he cannot feel the happiness of being a mother!
Du lieber, lieber Engel, du,	You dear, dear angel you,
Du schauest mich an und lächelst dazu!	You look at me and smile as you do!
An meinem Herzen, an meiner Brust,	At my heart, at my breast,
Du meine Wonne, du meine Lust!	You my bliss, you my joy! ³³

In a way, it seems as though she feels regret for her husband because he cannot completely know or share the wonderful feelings she has for her precious child. However, as this song ends, she is overwhelmed by the bliss and the joy that her angel of a child brings her. Unfortunately, the happiness that she and her husband share would not last. In the eighth and final song of this song cycle, she sings to the memory of the man who is no longer with her. Though we don't know why, her husband has died, and she is left with nothing but the memories she has of him.

³³ Ibid., 84.

Nun hast du mir den ersten Schmerz getan

Nun hast du mir den ersten Schmerz getan,	Now you have hurt me for the first time—
Der aber traf.	But the blow struck deep.
Du schläfst, du harter,	You sleep the sleep of death,
Unbarmherz'ger Mann, den Todesschlaf.	You hard, uncompassionate man.
Es blicket die Verlass'ne vor sich hin,	The woman you have left behind peers at the future
Die Welt ist leer, ist leer.	And sees an empty world before her.
Geliebet hab' ich und gelebt,	I have loved and I have lived;
Ich bin nicht lebend mehr.	I am no longer alive.
Ich zieh' mich in mein Inn'res still zurück,	I quietly withdraw into my inner self;
Der Schleier fällt,	The veil falls;
Da hab' ich dich und mein verlor'nes Glück,	There I have you and my lost happiness,
Du meine Welt!	You who were my world! ³⁴

In the midst of shock and loss, all that she recalls of her past happiness becomes tainted by her present pain. With her child being the only thing left of the happy life she led, she retreats inwardly to escape the pain of the present and to find what happiness she can in memories of the past. As the song ends, “we discover that the postlude is not merely a rote transcription of the accompaniment of the first song. Tiny changes in detail subtly reflect the widow’s altered perspective. . . . Schumann’s postlude may be thought to represent a memory, and not merely a symbolic or formal return, precisely because the past is brought back through the filter of present emotion and experience.”³⁵ This is the most moving song of the cycle, as it shows how changed our heroine is by the end, and the postlude functions well, as it returns to the altered melody of the first song and concludes the performance.

Performing this song cycle challenges the singing technique, the endurance, and the acting ability of the artist. I had the opportunity to perform Schumann’s *Frauenliebe und Leben* for my junior recital as partial fulfillment of my Bachelor of Arts in Music degree. Having limited experience of singing German before this, I strove to satisfy the demand of articulating

³⁴ Ibid., 85.

³⁵ Muxfeldt, “Frauenliebe und Leben Now and Then,” 47.

the German diction. It required a lot of practice, which I happily put the time into, because I didn't want to do this song cycle the dishonor of performing it incorrectly. Having never sung a song cycle before, my endurance was certainly tested. I'm convinced that my voice was strengthened through all of the time and work I put into learning and practicing *Frauenliebe und Leben*. Performing it to the best of my ability not only stretched me as a singer but also as an actress. I took the time to understand the character and learn about her personal history and the way she thought. Looking at the history involved in this cycle and with the composer significantly contributed to the process of discovering the female character. I used several acting skills, as I imagined myself to be in her shoes, and I added movements and facial expressions into the performance that I felt would fit her character. As the performer, it was a tremendous help for me to be as historically informed about the song cycle as I could, so that I was able to accurately portray the heroine of *Frauenliebe und Leben* to the audience. This was quite the learning experience for me, and I'm delighted to have had the opportunity to study this song cycle and perform it to the best of my ability.

There is a fundamental truth that anyone who studies music should come to know, and it is that there is a difference between a perfect performance and an eloquent performance. A perfect performance, as one would expect, is where the performer takes the stage and performs the notes, rhythms, lyrics, dynamics, and everything else that is written in the score perfectly. While it is an accomplishment to be able to learn the music and perform it in front of an audience, it still may seem as though it is lacking something. For example, if the audience didn't know anything about the songs of the *Frauenliebe und Leben* cycle, it's hard to say how much they would be able to gather from a perfect performance of it.

If the performer stands on stage with a pleasant look on her face and doesn't move at all or show any other expression, the audience may come to the conclusion that it is a pretty song and she performed it well enough. However, those that don't speak German wouldn't be able to say what it could possibly be about or what the performer was trying to convey through the music. Technically speaking, it might as well have been the perfect performance, but because it lacked passion and expression, it wasn't an eloquent performance.

In order for it to be an eloquent performance, it would serve the performer well to learn the history behind the songs and then determine the best way to communicate the story to the audience. While it is important, as a musician, to perform music skillfully, proficiently learning the music is merely the first step. It is the combination of supplementing the knowledge of the history, the passion, and the experience into the music that elevates it as an outstanding performance. Therefore, a historically informed performance is not just a perfect performance but also has the potential to be an eloquent one, where the audience has every opportunity of understanding and appreciating every aspect of the music, especially when it comes to a woman's love and life.

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